

**A NATIONAL STUDY
ON THE PREVALENCE
AND CHARECTERISTICS
OF SMOKING
IN ALBANIA**

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■ Introduction

Information from the World Health Organization (WHO) shows that smoking is one of the main reasons of increasing death rates worldwide. The reproductive male population is threatened more than the female population. Smoking reduces life expectancy by 20-25 years for each regular smoker.

Albania is a country in the Balkans region, which suffered isolation for almost 50 years. Albania had a tobacco production industry, which was mainly providing for in country consumption needs. There was never any assessment made on the prevalence and smoking habits in the country. The only information available was that of the quantity of tobacco produced and processed, number of employees working for the tobacco industry, the sales realized in the designated tobacco selling spots and the exported quantity.

The only information that can be retrieved with regards to smoking habits during these years is from individual recounts or hearsay, i.e. the fact that smoking was more predominant in men than in women, or the fact that smoking rolled tobacco or pipe was more predominant in rural areas as opposed to urban areas, etc.

In the past, international tobacco sales companies were not recognized in Albania, they became familiar and entered Albanian market only after 1991. Their presence changed the way tobacco and cigarettes were traded and consumed in Albania. It also changed the tobacco market in the country, heavily increasing the imports. This phenomenon however, was left unmeasured.

The first studies on the predominance of smoking throughout Albania were conducted by the end of '90-s, following another study in 2002 where the smoking habits for the population of the capital, Tirana, was measured.

- **Next Study – observations of Agenda Institute in cooperation with University of Baltimore and the American Cancer Association**

A national survey, including all territories in Albania, was conducted on 4000 individuals over 18 years during the months of April- May 2007. This survey was conducted not long before the law on “protecting health and smoking ban in public areas” was passed. The purpose of this survey was to measure the degree of smoking prevalence and the characteristic of smokers in national level.

The methodology used for collecting data was by direct interviews. The 4000 individuals were female and male population residing in urban and rural areas. The response indicator was 100%, confidence interval 95% and margin of error $\pm 1.5 \%$

This study is conducted within the framework of the national standards for Smoke Control, an initiative of the 12th World Conference on Tobacco and Health held in Helsinki, Finland during August 2003. The American Cancer Association, World Health Organization, and the International Union against Cancer are the leading international organizations that carry out such studies across the world.

- ***Smoking Prevalence***

In Albania, 34.9% of the population over 18 years old are regular smokers. Apart from the regular smokers, another 6.5% of the population over 18 years old smoke occasionally. They do not exhibit daily smoking habits, but rather weekly. About 6.8% of the adult population has quit smoking or not smoked in the last six months.

In Albania, 52% of the population over 18 years old are non smokers. Regular smokers are more predominant in the urban areas (36,6%) as opposed to the rural ones. It is also noticeable that efforts to quit smoking are more prevalent within population in the cities as apposed to those in the rural areas. However, the number of smokers in the rural areas is higher than that in the cities.

As for the distribution by age groups, the regular smokers are those of 55 years old and above, who are also the heaviest consumers be that in urban or rural areas. In cities, the regular smoker of a younger age group, between 18-19 years old outnumber those in rural areas, however the prevalence of female smokers in cities is zero.

Albanian male population smokes more than the female population. The regular male smokers outnumber the female smokers. In villages, the female smokers make only 7,7% of the total smokers, whereas in cities they make 16,3% of the total. In rural areas, non-regular female smokers are half the number of same type female smokers in the cities.

Male population of age group over 55 years old in the cities have attempted quitting smoking more than those in the rural areas, and the percentage of non smoking male population is 11% higher than that of male non smokers in rural areas.

Table 1. Prevalence of smoking in Albania

		Total	Regular Smokers	Non Regular Smokers	Former Smokers	Non Smokers
Total		100.0	34.9	6.5	6.8	51.9
	18 - 19 yrs	100.0	14.2	9.0	0.5	76.3
	20 - 24 yrs	100.0	29.1	11.1	2.5	57.3
	25 - 34 yrs	100.0	35.4	7.5	2.9	54.1
	35 - 44 yrs	100.0	36.0	5.3	6.7	52.0
	45 - 54 yrs	100.0	37.6	6.2	9.0	47.2
	55 - 64 yrs	100.0	38.6	4.0	10.4	47.0
	over 65 yrs	100.0	39.8	4.0	14.6	41.6
Male		100.0	58.8	5.6	10.7	24.8
	18 - 19 yrs	100.0	26.9		1.0	56.6
	20 - 24 yrs	100.0	49.3	9.8	3.0	37.8
	25 - 34 yrs	100.0	64.2	6.7	5.3	23.8
	35 - 44 yrs	100.0	61.6	3.1	11.3	24.0
	45 - 54 yrs	100.0	63.9	4.5	14.6	16.9
	55 - 64 yrs	100.0	59.6	4.1	17.1	19.2
	over 65 yrs	100.0	60.2	2.5	19.8	17.6
Female		100.0	11.5	7.4	2.9	78.2
	18 - 19 yrs	100.0	2.5	2.9	0.0	94.6
	20 - 24 yrs	100.0	10.3	12.3	1.9	75.5
	25 - 34 yrs	100.0	8.9	8.3	0.8	82.0
	35 - 44 yrs	100.0	10.2	7.5	2.0	80.2

45 - 54 yrs	100.0	9.5	8.0	3.1	79.5
55 - 64 yrs	100.0	16.4	3.9	3.3	76.4
over 65 yrs	100.0	21.8	5.4	10.1	62.7

Smoking prevalence measured in May 2007 showed that smoker's behavior in Albania remains almost the same as in 2002.

▪ *How much do they smoke?*

Albanian smokers smoke an average of 21,9 cigarettes a day. The 45-54 age group in cities and rural areas smoke more than other age groups. The age group of 18-19 years old female population in the villages consumes 22,5 cigarettes a day. The daily consumption of cigarettes among female population residing in villages varies compared to those residing in cities. There is a difference in consumption of cigarettes between female and male population, as expected.

With exception of females in the age group of 18-19 years old, females of all other age groups smoke less than males. Females of over 65 years old show more consistency in smoking habits than man.

Non-regular smokers consume 16,7 cigarettes per week, on average. Of this group, male in rural areas smoke an average of 19,8 cigarettes per week, whereas those in urban areas smoke an average of 17,2 cigarettes per week.

Table 2. Average number of cigarettes smoked by regular smokers per day

	Place	Urban	Rural	Male	Urban	Rural	Female	Urban	Rural
Total	21.9	21.5	22.3	23.5	23.5	23.5	14.0	14.7	12.7
18 - 19 yrs	21.7	21.8	21.6	21.7	21.8	21.3	22.5	0.0	22.5
20 - 24 yrs	19.0	16.8	21.2	20.4	17.9	22.5	12.4	14.0	6.5
25 - 34 yrs	22.2	22.1	22.4	23.5	24.0	23.1	14.1	13.2	15.5
35 - 44 yrs	22.5	22.6	22.5	24.0	24.9	23.4	13.6	14.0	12.8
45 - 54 yrs	23.6	23.8	23.4	24.9	25.1	24.8	13.8	15.9	11.0
55 - 64 yrs	21.9	20.6	23.2	24.3	23.4	24.8	12.9	14.6	8.0
over 65 yrs	20.3	19.9	20.6	22.3	21.9	22.6	15.3	16.7	13.9

▪ *Have smokers attempted to quit smoking in the last 12 months?*

During the survey, the indicators with regards to attempts made to quit smoking have been optimistic. The efforts in cities have been more obvious than in villages, and this can be attributed to the abundance and accessibility of information as well as the effect of this information in these areas. The results of quitting smoking due to counseling received by the specialized health authorities are at the same levels in cities and villages alike. Smokers seek little advice from doctors with regards to attempts to quit smoking.

Table 3. Smokers who have quit smoking in the last 12 months, in %

		Total	Total Yes	No	Not smoked
Total		100.0	12.9	29.1	58.0
	18 - 19 yrs	100.0	10.6	12.6	76.8
	20 - 24 yrs	100.0	13.3	27.6	59.1
	25 - 34 yrs	100.0	11.7	31.7	56.6
	35 - 44 yrs	100.0	12.5	30.0	57.5
	45 - 54 yrs	100.0	13.9	30.5	55.6
	55 - 64 yrs	100.0	11.5	31.7	56.8
	over 65 yrs	100.0	16.9	27.4	55.7

▪ *What is the cost of smoking?*

The survey conducted in May showed that the cost of a pack of cigarettes consumed by Albanians is 129,8 Albanian lek, whereas in September 2002 the price for a pack was 89,3 lek. In May the average prices for a list of articles calculated by INSTAT were as follows; 1 kg of bread (64,1 lek), 1 kg cooking oil (137,5 lek), 1 kg flower (63,9 lek), 1 kg potatoes (60,2 lek), 1 kg sugar (71,3 lek). Hence, the price of a pack of cigarettes in the market results as higher than the price of some articles used for everyday household consumption.

Albania currently does not produce or supply the amount of cigarettes demanded for everyday consumption so this product is imported. From 2002 to 2006 the quantity of imported cigarettes

in Albania varied between 3900 and 4200 ton per year. Expressed in different terms, this amount means that during this time Albania has imported from 195 to 210 million packs of cigarette every year. The level of market informality with regards to this product has been high for several years, regardless of attempts to fight such informality. Taking in consideration the smoking prevalence, the daily consumption of cigarettes and the quantity imported per year, it is estimated that the informality with regards to this product for the year 2006 was 45%.

The data gathered from the survey showed that the consumption of cigarettes per year, from regular and non-regular smokers was 6307 cigarettes, whereas the quantity imported for year 2006 was 4118 ton. The tobacco produced in country is an inconsiderable quantity and does not influence the estimates above.

- *About the law*

Starting from July of this year, the law prohibits production and trade of cigarettes containing 10 mg tar, 1 mg nicotine and over 10 mg carbon monoxide. The tests on the content of tar and nicotine are based in the ISO standards. According to the law, the use of terms “contains low levels of tar, light, ultra light or low” or other similar terms are prohibited to use on any labels put on a pack of cigarettes of any brand and all labels on a pack of cigarette must be written in Albanian.

The law does not foresee the use of designated smoking areas. The owner/administrator of the areas for public use should put non-smoking signs in visible places and should not allow placing ashtrays in public places. The owner is responsible for the application of all smoking restriction and law. The law also prohibits smoking for individuals under 18 years old.

- *About the world*

Every 6,5 minutes one person dies in the world as result of smoking. These are the latest estimates published by the World Health Organization. The WHO warns of the consequences of smoking, drawing particular attention to the poor and developing countries. By smoking people

in poor countries aggravate their economic and social conditions. This year motto for international anti- smoking day is “ Smoking and poverty – the devils circle”.

According to the annual reports from WHO, the underdeveloped countries are more vulnerable and exposed to diseases and death caused by smoking. According to the figures, 84% of the smoking population lives in the developing countries. The devils circle with smoking means that this kind of sin reduces further the already low household budget.

There is sufficient evidence related to the theory above. “About 10,5 million people in Bangladesh would have secured better food supplies with the money spent on smoking. Out of their household budget, the smokers spent ten times more money on cigarettes than in schooling. In Bombay, India, people without a roof over their head spend more money on smoking than their food and other necessities. Furthermore, 40% of the income of students or workers in Nigeria goes to smoking. This is not all: WHO warns that smoking has serious damaging effects on the individuals health system. According to studies from the World Bank 6-15% of all expenses of the health system in the industrial and developed world goes to treatment of diseases caused by smoking. There is no accurate data with regards to such expenditure in the poor countries. Hence, the WHO opposes the arguments of the tobacco industries, which claim that this industry provides employment and helps improve the wellbeing of the population.